

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

ORAL REPLY

QUESTION 411

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411. Mrs N R Mashabela (EFF) to ask the Minister of Basic Education [Interdepartmentally transferred from Social Development with effect 31 August 2023]: to ask the Minister of Basic Education:

In light of how children living with disabilities and autism are often overlooked when it comes to early childhood development (ECD) programmes, what (a) steps has she taken to provide such children with access to a stimulating ECD phase, and (b) is the total number of ECD centres with trained practitioners for children with special needs in the Republic?

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Response

1. Before receiving the ECD function, the DBE had already developed the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) for Children from Birth to Four, and ensured that it has a strong inclusivity focus. More recently, the DBE has been developing guidelines to strengthen the implementation of the NCF. These guidelines include specific guidance on how to enable inclusive approaches in ECD programmes. To further support ECD practitioners with the implementation of the NCF, the DBE is developing daily activity plans, with integrated learning and teaching support materials. This also includes a focus on ensuring an Inclusive Resource Kit. The DBE is also developing a module on Inclusive teaching practices to include in the PLAYSA Online Training of ECD practitioners. The DBE is also working on updating the Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) policy to include children from birth to 4 years old. The DBE has also partnered with the University of Johannesburg to develop a screening tool for ECD practitioners to enable early identification. Building on this, the DBE is also engaging with the Department of Health to ensure referral systems and support teams are being established. A working session has been held to develop Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for the establishment of School-based Support Teams and District-Based Support Teams. Finally, the DBE has also contracted UHambo to conduct capacity building for ECD practitioners and parents. They have been holding dialogues and training sessions in the Eastern Cape, Mpumalanga, KwaZulu-Natal and the Western Cape.

2. To date, 8 337 ECD Practitioners have been trained on the implementation of the Policy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support to ensure that all learners, including learners with disabilities, are supported. Regarding access to formal learning programmes, 4 381 are benefitting from the Learning Programme for Learners with Profound Intellectual Disabilities. The Learning Programme signed and approved by the Minister in 2023, caters for awareness, transitional and interactive levels, which are key for early childhood development.